

Davis Projects for Peace - Student project aims to expand women's enterprise in Niger

St. Paul, Minn. – A Macalester student from Niger has received a \$10,000 grant to return this summer to her childhood home to help women there expand their peanut-processing business, allowing them to better provide for and educate their children.

Rayanatou Laouali '12 (Davis UWC Scholar.) of Niamey, Niger, received the grant under the Davis Projects for Peace initiative funded by philanthropist Kathryn Wasserman Davis. Their project is one of 122 selected for funding through a competition on more than 90 campuses, in which students designed grassroots projects for peace that they themselves will implement throughout the world.

Laouali grew up in Maradi, Niger, her parents' homeland. Maradi is the poorest of the eight provinces in Niger, which is among the poorest countries in the world according to the United Nations Human Development Index. While visiting Maradi in 2009 and 2010, Laouali talked with women of the Hadin-Kay cooperative, a 10-member group that works together to hand-process about 70 kilos of peanuts per day. Hand roasting, peeling and grinding these peanuts for a local farmer earns them about \$2.25 each per day, barely enough to survive. Laouali felt compelled to help.



“During my visit this winter, I sat down with the women in Hadin-Kay to talk about the project,” says Laouali. “With a grant from the Davis Projects for Peace, the cooperative can expand its business, allowing the women to buy their *own* peanuts, and make and sell their *own* peanut oil, in addition to processing the peanuts of their clients. As a result, they will be able to double their daily income.”

Laouali is just the person to implement this project. She speaks the same language, Hausa, as the women and shares their culture, but she is also a role model demonstrating the importance of education, especially for girls. She is majoring in economics and in applied math and statistics, and has availed herself of internships and jobs to prepare herself for her ultimate goal of starting a microfinance non-profit in Niger.

And she is not deterred by intermediate failures—she won the grant in her *third* year of applying to this highly competitive program, constantly refining and improving her proposal.

Her project, to be implemented late May through July of 2011, will include

- Construction of an expanded work space with more equipment, e.g. peanut roasting pans
- Developing a more sophisticated accounting system and setting aside a portion of profits for maintenance and to invest in other community projects
- Woman-to-woman workshops on supporting the education of their children, reducing mosquitoes and thereby malaria, and creating a healthier environment.

“Peace is the ability to live in a state of security,” wrote Laouali in her proposal. “It begins with using one’s skills and strength to provide for basic livelihood needs, such as for food, housing and clothing. It is also the ability to prepare one’s children for a better future by giving them the right to go to school and be educated

like other youth in developed countries.”

Kathryn Wasserman Davis launched the Projects for Peace initiative on the occasion of her 100th birthday in 2007. She is the mother of Shelby M.C. Davis who funds the Davis UWC Scholars Program currently involving over 90 American colleges and universities, including Macalester; the competition involves students from those colleges.

Macalester College, founded in 1874, is a national liberal arts college with a full-time enrollment of 1,958 students. Macalester is nationally recognized for its long-standing commitment to academic excellence, internationalism, multiculturalism and civic engagement. Learn more at [macalester.edu](http://www.macalester.edu) (<http://www.macalester.edu/>)

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